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Testimony of Rep. Benjamin Hymes

L.D. 1091, “An Act to Reinforce Free Speech at Town Meetings by Allowing Persons a Minimum Amount of Time in Which to Speak”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

March 31, 2025

Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government.

I am Representative Benjamin Hymes, proudly representing House District 38. I am here today to present LD 1091, “An Act to Reinforce Free Speech at Town Meetings by Allowing Persons a Minimum Amount of Time in Which to Speak”.

This bill as a straightforward First Amendment issue. While free speech and religious freedom are frequently discussed, another critical part of the First Amendment is often overlooked: the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances. This bill addresses a failure to uphold that right for Maine citizens.

As elected officials, we understand the responsibilities of public service, including listening to those who disagree with us. It isn't always easy, but it is essential. Our role is to represent the people who elect us—plain and simple. If we deny them the right to speak, we risk making policy in a vacuum. This is happening in Maine, and history shows that suppressing public input is how tyrannical governments take hold.

This bill simply ensures that municipalities allow citizens a few minutes to exercise their First Amendment right. It does not interfere with a municipality's ability to conduct orderly meetings or maintain decorum. The presiding official retains control over the meeting, ensuring discussions remain respectful and productive.

Some have suggested setting a standard three-minute speaking limit, as we do here, or including penalties for noncompliance. I leave these considerations to the committee's discretion.

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions.

Benjamin C. Hymes
State Representative